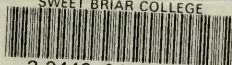



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REPRESENTATIONS OF WITCHES IN POPULAR LITERATURE IN ENGLAND
1566-1645

by

Joanna J. Kucinski

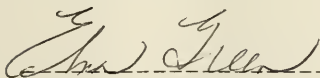
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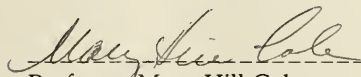
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Representations of Witches in Popular Literature
in England 1566-1645

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Joanna J. Kucinski

Senior Honors Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for Honors in the Department of History

Sweet Briar College
Sweet Briar, Virginia, 24595

Dr. Joan R. Kent, advisor

April 24, 1998

"I pledge..."
Joanna J. Kucinski

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I. Introduction

Witchcraft has long intrigued both scholars and lay readers, at least partly because of the fascination of the supernatural, but also because of the central role that imagery of witches occupies in western culture's fears and nightmares. Scholars once viewed witchcraft, however, as a minor side issue in the history of the early modern period, a persistence of medieval superstitions among peasants that were slowly being eradicated by the rise of modernity. Historians assumed that witchcraft trials resulted from cases in which the accused actually practiced, or attempted to practice, some form of magic.¹ Beginning in the 1960's, however, scholars began to explore the nature of witchcraft in new ways, as an indicator of tensions resulting from a changing social climate. The subject of witchcraft in early modern England has always been regarded as distinct in most ways from its continental counterpart, but English witchcraft came under review and revision as well.

The works of Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane in the 1970's were the first and perhaps most influential of these new histories of witchcraft in early modern England. In *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Thomas devotes a large section to the changing nature and dynamics of witchcraft in the early modern period, and its ultimate decline. Macfarlane, a student and colleague of Thomas, wrote an influential study of witchcraft in Essex. Their closely related interpretations of the subject are generally grouped together under the heading of the Thomas/Macfarlane interpretation of witchcraft.

One major argument in the Thomas/Macfarlane model is that continental notions of witchcraft differed from those indigenous to England, and these continental beliefs

¹Jonathan Barry, "Introduction" Keith Thomas and the problem of witchcraft" in Barry, Marianne Hester and Gareth Roberts, eds., *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, 1996) pp. 2-3.

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were slow to be incorporated into popular English notions. The English ideas of witchcraft focused on *maleficium*, acts of personal harm or damage committed by the witch or her familiars, the spirit associates of witches who took the shape of small animals and assisted them in causing harm. They claim that continental elements, such as the pact with the Devil and witches sabbats, were initially absent. As English divines, especially strong Protestants, began to absorb this continental ideology, they began to superimpose it over the maleficic witchcraft beliefs already present. Thus, popular notions of witchcraft in England slowly changed, gradually growing closer to continental beliefs as the lower orders acquired them from the clergy.²

A second important strand of the Thomas/Macfarlane argument is that witchcraft accusations arose out of certain types of social tensions and thus reflected the changing nature of English society. While Thomas admits that the situations surrounding witchcraft accusations varied widely, he suggests a general pattern of interactions. He claims that accusations usually arose because of an unexplained misfortune or illness. The victim of the circumstance looked around for a cause, someone to blame, and lit upon a poor, marginal member of the community, someone whom they were aware they had mistreated. Often, the individual was a beggar who had come for alms, which traditional notions of charity demanded of better-off members of the community, but who had nevertheless been turned away by the accuser. The accuser was moving away from the traditional "communal" standards of conduct towards a more modern "individualistic" approach, but felt guilt about ignoring the demands of charity. When misfortune struck, he blamed the beggar whom he felt had been wronged. Thus, Thomas/Macfarlane suggest that witchcraft resulted largely from changes in society and social tensions.³

²Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Charles Scribner's Sons (New York, 1971) pp. 439-455.

³Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 553-559.

This argument has become the standard view, providing a starting point for most subsequent studies.

Witchcraft has been scrutinized from the angle of different disciplines, such as anthropology, literature, and sociology. In the past three decades, the types of evidence considered and approaches taken in studying witchcraft in early modern England have also undergone dramatic change.

One direction taken by recent research has been to broaden the discussion of patterns of accusations. J.A. Sharpe suggested that while the work of Thomas and Macfarlane opened important lines of questioning, their model of accusation was too simple, ignoring other patterns of allegations. Based on a study of witchcraft narratives from Yorkshire, he argues that some witchcraft cases developed from tension and competition between women, rather than simply from refusal of alms.⁴ Malcolm Gaskill, working primarily with documents from early modern Kent, has also expanded and enlarged the Thomas/Macfarlane model. He claims that scholars have emphasized witchcraft accusations which conform to the stereotype of an older woman dependent on alms at the expense of other kinds of cases, and seeks to broaden the picture by presenting a greater variety of cases.⁵ Gaskill shows that not all, or even perhaps most, witches were older, marginal females; he points out instances in which accusations involved women who were, in fact, accepted and interconnected with the community and were even assertive; he draws attention to incidents where entire families and even factions within the community were implicated, and also to cases in which men of various standings within the community were accused.⁶ Sharpe and Gaskill do not seek

⁴J. A. Sharpe, "Witchcraft and Women in Seventeenth Century England," in *Continuity and Change* 6 (2) 1991. p. 192.

⁵Malcolm Gaskill, "Witchcraft in early modern Kent: stereotypes and the background to accusations" in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Robert, eds. (Cambridge, 1996) p. 278.

⁶Gaskill, "Witchcraft in early modern Kent," pp. 263-287.

to disprove the Thomas/Macfarlane interpretation of witchcraft, but rather to add to the understanding of the types of individuals and the circumstances involved.

Another recent trend in witchcraft studies has been to look at the accusations as the result of factional conflicts at the village level. Some scholars have attempted to do case studies of particular incidents, and reconstruct as nearly as possible the context of village politics in which the accusations arose. Anne Rieber De Windt, for example, has examined a case of possession at Warboys in Huntingdon. In this incident, the victims of the alleged witchcraft were the children of a newly arrived family who claimed gentry status in a community which had previously lacked any nobility.⁷ The case ranged the gentry family, the Throckmortons, against the villagers who supported the accused witches. The witchcraft case, therefore, was a front in a dispute among factions of the village. De Windt argues that the Warboys case contributes to the discussion of the evolving nature of the community.⁸ Annabel Gregory did a similar study of a witchcraft trial in Rye. She explored the differences in economic standing, religious outlook, and social position of the accusers and the accused and her supporters, and concluded that factionalism as well as changing social conditions had played a major role in the witchcraft accusation.⁹ Such studies extend the analysis of witchcraft as a phenomena related to changing social conditions, adding a political dimension to the models of social change.

Another avenue of research on witchcraft developing from the Thomas/Macfarlane studies has been the further examination of witchcraft *beliefs*. Clive Holmes, for example, has looked particularly at the relationship between popular witchcraft

⁷ Anne Rieber DeWindt, "Witchcraft and Conflicting Visions of the Ideal Village Community," *Journal of British Studies*, 34 (1995) p. 433.

⁸ DeWindt, p. 429.

⁹ Annabel Gregory, "Witchcraft, Politics and "Good Neighbourhood" in Early Seventeenth Century Rye," *Past & Present*, 133 (1991) pp. 31-66.

beliefs and the learned notions of witchcraft. He argues that the changes in witchcraft beliefs in England resulted not from the imposition of learned beliefs over popular notions, but rather from a synthesis between them. He suggests that magistrates and divines were forced to incorporate popular notions, such as familiars and witches' marks, making them fit with their own views. The populace, meanwhile, accepted the parts of learned witchcraft that fit with their own needs, assumptions, aspirations, and concerns.¹⁰ James Sharpe has also reevaluated the Thomas/Macfarlane characterization of English witchcraft beliefs. He suggests that the line between popular witchcraft beliefs and learned notions was not as distinct as Thomas suggested, but rather that demonic elements were already present in England.¹¹ A major direction taken by recent witchcraft research, therefore, has been the reappraisal of English witchcraft beliefs in the early modern period.

Because of the high percentage of women accused of witchcraft, feminist historians have also been drawn to the subject and they have produced another major line of interpretation. Feminist scholars like Marianne Hester and Anne Llewellyn Barstow, who also works with continental witchcraft, have reexamined patterns of English witchcraft prosecutions and the symbolism of witchcraft belief, suggesting that witchcraft accusations were gender based and served as a method of reinforcing patriarchy and controlling women. They have been highly critical of Thomas and Macfarlane for ignoring this issue. Hester argues that witchcraft was, in fact, a mechanism of male domination over women in a period when the patriarchal society was being restructured. As society changed, new forms of oppression were required to maintain the *status quo*

¹⁰Clive Holmes, "Witches, Magistrates, and Divines" in Steven L. Kaplam, ed. *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1984) pp. 98-105.

¹¹Jim Sharpe, "The Devil in East Anglia: the Matthew Hopkins trial reconsidered" ??? pp.239-248.

inequality between males and females.¹² In her argument, she suggests that witchcraft was linked to anxieties about female sexuality and the perceived differences between men and women, and that the stereotypical image of the witch grew up around such anxieties.¹³ In periods of narrowing economic opportunity, witchcraft trials also became a tool by which men could assert their own social superiority and, at the same time, eliminate female competition in certain crafts, in which widows in particular might participate.¹⁴ Hester sees witchcraft, therefore, as an instrument of male oppression of women. Barstow, working on European witchcraft as a whole, similarly asserts that witch hunting was an attempt to control women's bodies, and through ritualized shaming, keep them in their place in society.¹⁵ Feminist scholars have been one major group recently reconsidering witchcraft.

Other scholars have approached the issue of witchcraft in early modern England from a more literary stance. Frances Dolan worked with witch plays and popular pamphlets, analyzing the imagery and portrayals of witches to suggest the types of fears arising from the perception of witchcraft. She suggests that witches, though seen as "other" and demonic, were regarded as dangerous largely because of their familiarity with their victims. She also proposes that witches may have become personifications of unacceptable feelings within the family, becoming the objects of their neighbor's attempts to displace familial tensions. She concludes that representations were shaped by and articulated anxieties about interdependency and intimacy in the community.¹⁶

¹²Marianne Hester, "Patriarchal reconstruction and witch hunting" in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief* Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Robert, eds. (Cambridge, 1996) p. 298.

¹³Hester, pp. 293-298.

¹⁴Hester, pp. 303- 305.

¹⁵Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze: A New History of the European Witch Hunts*. Harper Collins (San Francisco, 1994).

¹⁶Frances Dolan, "Witchcraft and the Threat of the Familiar," in *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England 1550-1700*. Cornell University Press (Ithaca and London, 1994) pp. 171-236

Deborah Willis also works with the imagery associated with witches. She suggests that witches were often represented as distortions of the ideals of motherhood. Witches were the antithesis of mothers, who nurtured familiar imps while harming children. Witches, therefore, became symbols of fears about maternal power.¹⁷


One rich documentary source for scholars of English witchcraft has been a series of popular contemporary pamphlets published between 1566 and the mid seventeenth century. These pamphlets recorded the proceedings in witchcraft trials, recounting some of the more interesting evidence and often the confessions of the alleged witches. The pamphlets also occasionally included the authors' commentaries about the threat of witchcraft. While almost all scholars of witchcraft in England have used these pamphlets in crafting their interpretations, historians have used them primarily to support and supplement other records, such as indictments and depositions from the witchcraft trials. Macfarlane argues that the pamphlets, which are often more detailed than other sources, seem generally quite accurate when compared to indictments of the same trials.¹⁸ Gaskill, however, suggests that Macfarlane is perhaps too uncritical of the reliability of the pamphlets as a source, pointing to the selective nature of the narratives and the likely exaggeration of stereotypes found in the pamphlets.¹⁹

The pamphlets are literary sources which must be approached with a degree of caution. There are certain limitations and problems inherent in the documents which must be considered. The pamphlets are second-hand accounts, filtered through the medium of literate, somewhat educated writers. The pamphleteers' own beliefs and inclinations are certain to affect the accounts they recorded, if only in the word choices

¹⁷Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture: Witch hunting and Maternal Power in Early Modern England*. Cornell University Press (Ithaca and London, 1995).

¹⁸Alan MacFarlane, *Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England: A Regional and Comparative Study* (London, 1970) pp.84-85.

¹⁹Gaskill, "Witchcraft in early modern Kent", pp. 260-261.



which are employed. While some bits of testimony sound as though they have been recorded nearly verbatim, other sections have clearly been shortened and summarized, and presumably some evidence has been left out altogether. Moreover, there is a process of selection at work in the writing of the pamphlets. There were so many witchcraft trials in this period that if the pamphleteers had written about all of them, the market would have soon been saturated. The writers, therefore, selected the particular proceedings they considered the most interesting. Whatever the basis of the decisions, they directly affected the record which has survived in the pamphlets.

While the pamphlets do have limitations and inherent biases, they are nevertheless useful sources. They contain representations of witches from several view points. The individuals who stood accused of witchcraft were themselves almost universally marginal and illiterate, and therefore were unable to leave a record of their own views in regard to their situations. The pamphlets, which often include the witches' own testimonies and conversations between the defendants and their accusers, provide and almost unique opportunity to look at the witches' own words, albeit translated through the medium of the pamphleteer. The recorded confessions provide the opportunity to examine the ways in which accused witches represented themselves, and how their neighbors saw them and perceived the powers of witchcraft. The pamphlets also suggest the prevalent notions about witchcraft at the time, and when ranged chronologically, illustrate the changing notions of witchcraft and the changing terminology used in witchcraft discussions.

This honors thesis is an attempt to explore certain aspects of the representation of witches and witchcraft in the popular pamphlets. The pamphlets used are a sampling of those available in print. They span the period between 1566 and 1645 and are drawn from a range of counties in England, including Essex, Berkshire, Huntingdonshire, Northamptonshire, Lancashire, and Lincolnshire. The evidence from the pamphlets has been supplemented in places with material from dramatic literature and witchcraft tracts.

The first chapter explores the manner in which the documents represent the interactions and relations between witches within a village. The pamphlets suggest that, rather than working in isolation, witches actually cooperated within a "community" patterned on the "neighborliness" of village life.

The second chapter investigates the imagery of family in the pamphlets and the interactions between accused witches and their relatives. Though some of the learned literature and drama of the period portrayed depraved and incestuous relationships between witches and their families, the pamphlets seldom reflect such a view. On the one hand, witches' relations with their families manifest a distorted version of the society's familial ideals, while on the other, the pamphlets hint at some of the tensions within the families which possibly contributed to accusations of witchcraft.

The final chapter examines the developing characterizations of familiars, and the relationships between familiars and the alleged witches. Familiars were depicted as a diabolical element present in English witchcraft from the 1566 pamphlet on. Familiar spirits were characterized as malicious, independent, and capricious from the first, though the image of familiars developed as learned beliefs about witchcraft gained increasing acceptance. The pamphlets also suggest that even as the familiars were problematic allies of the witches, they were nevertheless seen as the thread that bound together the witches of a community into a network, creating some degree of solidarity or support. Thus, the pamphlets present a complex representation of familiars and their relationship with witches.

These aspects of the representation of witches and witchcraft are interesting in themselves, and may contribute to the discussion of early modern English witchcraft. Studies of witchcraft are of wider interest, however, than simply as a novelty, a strange and fascinating aside to the history of the time. The treatment of witchcraft in the pamphlets may also suggest something about the wider beliefs, concerns, and tensions present in English society during the period.

II. Witches and "Community"

Witches, as portrayed by popular plays in early modern England, were isolated creatures, outcasts living well apart from the respectable society. Bewitchments occurred from a distance, and contact was usually made through some sort of intermediary, such as a familiar or an individual seeking aid from the witch. For example, in Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*, the title character, Hecate, appears only in scenes set in her own space, surrounded by her evil familiars.²⁰ Contact with the licit community is limited to visits from members of the community, namely Sebastian and the Duchess. Suggestively, they come to Hecate even though they are of higher rank rather than summoning her to their homes, as though her presence might cause corruption. Moreover, these characters enter Hecate's realm with reluctance; Sebastian explains "I enter this damned place; but such extremes/ Of wrongs in love fight 'gainst religious knowledge."²¹ He regards Hecate's dwelling as an evil place apart from his own sphere which he would not normally enter, were it not for the extremes to which his situation drives him. Thus, Middleton firmly sets his witch apart from the legitimate society. Moreover, the only reference Hecate makes to leaving her home is when she plans to go to the Mayor's house to visit his son as an incubus.²² She does not venture into the community in her own shape. Frances E. Dolan points out that in all of the witchcraft plays written during this time, witches are depicted as separate from the licit community; only in *The Witch of Edmonton* is the relationship between the witch and the community

²⁰Thomas Middleton, "The Witch", in Peter Corbin and Douglas Sedge, *Three Jacobean Witch Plays*, Manchester University Press, Manchester (1986) pp.91-148.

²¹Middleton, p.94.

²²Middleton, p. 92.

central to the story and, as Dolan explains, the drama "ultimately eliminates her from the play's community."²³

Historians, however, have disputed this view of witches as figures isolated from the larger village community. Scholars from Keith Thomas and Alan Macfarlane on have focused on the social relations involved in witchcraft, particularly the interactions between accused witches and their communities. They have shown that, far from being excluded from their settlements, they frequently interacted with others in their community. In fact, it was in some cases the women's position in society, her intrusiveness, or her assertiveness which may explain how she came to be accused of witchcraft.²⁴ Witches have been portrayed as actually bringing harm through their interactions within the community.

The pamphlet's representations of witches' activities within their neighborhoods support the historians' claim that witches were not isolated from village societies. Pamphlets from 1566, 1579, 1582, 1589, and 1613 all contain incidents like those described by Thomas in which a women came to be accused of witchcraft after she came begging for alms but was turned away.²⁵ The pamphlets also contain examples of other sorts of interactions between accused witches and other villagers. The 1582 pamphlet concerning the witchcraft trials in St. Osyth, for instance, reported that Ursula Kemp nursed Grace Thurlow's children for many years, until Thurlow ended the association in spite of Kemp's bitter recriminations. After two of the children Kemp had not nursed became ill, while those that she had nursed remained healthy, Thurlow became one of the primary witnesses against Kemp.²⁶ Margaret Flower, accused of witchcraft in

²³Frances E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca (1994) pp. 218-219.

²⁴Refer to Introduction, pp. 1-6.

²⁵See Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England 1558-1618* (Amherst, MA, 1969) pp. 77, 87, 93-98, 110, 114, 358.

²⁶W.W., A true and just Recorde, of the Information, Examination, and Confession of all

Lincolnshire in 1618, worked for the Earl of Rutland, living "as a continual dweller in the Castle, looking both to the poultry abroad and the wash-house within doors," until she had a falling out with the Earl and his wife.²⁷ Some of the evidence in the trial of Agnes Glascock in 1582 came from a man named Sparrow who was a boarder in her house.²⁸ According to the 1582 pamphlet concerning the St. Osyth witches, Joan Robinson frequently quarreled with her neighbors when they refused her requests to purchase livestock or to lease land.²⁹ These examples support the argument that accused witches had relations, though not always pleasant ones, with others in their villages.

There is apparently a great deal of merit to the argument that witchcraft accusations arose, not because certain individuals were perceived as outside threats, but rather out of the context of regular social interactions. The pattern of the accusations in both the historians' interpretations and in the pamphlet representations suggests, in fact, that accusations developed when "neighborly" interactions within the village broke down. Accused witches, therefore, were not isolated in the sense of living outside the bounds of the village or parish, but rather were accused because of their relationships with others in the area.

Historians have generally suggested, however, that witches were isolated in another sense: they practiced their witchcraft as solitary individuals, rather than as groups. They are almost always represented acting alone, apart from other witches.³⁰ Thomas argues that the notion of witches' gathering was almost "foreign to the general run of English accusations," and though he admits that there were "a few scattered

the Witches, taken at S. Oses in the countie of Essex..." in Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England 1558-1618* (Amherst, MA, 1969) p. 107.

²⁷"The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillipa Flower" (London, 1619), in Rosen, p. 370.

²⁸W.W., p. 125.

²⁹W.W., pp. 153-156.

³⁰Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, Charles Scribner's Sons (New York, 1971) p.525.

allegations" of witches admitting to gathering together, he dismisses them as irrelevant deviations from the norm.³¹ He claims that witches' meetings did not become significant until the seventeenth century, when educated witchcraft beliefs had begun to permeate all levels of English society.³² However, though the instances of witches' gatherings are rare in the sixteenth century, the fact that a few do occur might have significance in that they indicate that the notion of witches gathering and cooperating together ~~were~~ ^{was} not alien to the English population even before Continental beliefs about witches' sabbats reached large sections of the population.

As early as 1579, the concept of witches meeting and acting as a group appeared in a popular pamphlet. One Elizabeth Stile, alias Rockingham, a widow living in Windsor, confessed "that Father Rosimond with his daughter, Mother Dutten, Mother Devell, Mother Margaret, and herself the said Elizabeth Rockingham, did accustom to meet within the backside of Master Dodge's, in the pits there, and did in that place conclude upon heinous and villainous practices, such as by them or any of them, before had been devised or determined."³³ Stile also was reported to claim "that they all purposed and agreed, by their sorceries and enchantments to dispatch privily one Langford a farmer, dwelling in Windsor by the Thames side, and that they murdered him accordingly," and that the group had in a like matter cooperated together to cause several similar incidents of *maleficium*.³⁴ Additionally, Stile claimed that one of the other witches in the group, Mother Margaret, gave her money and instructed her "in any wise not to detect their secrets," probably an attempt at bribery.³⁵ As Mother Margaret was

³¹Thomas, pp. 444-445.

³²Thomas, pp. 444-445, 441-442.

³³"A Rehearsall...of hainous and horrible actes committed by...Fowre notorious Witches apprehended at Winsore..."(London, 1579) from Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England 1558-1618* (Amherst, MA, 1969) p. 86.

³⁴"A Rehearsall...of hainous and horrible actes committed by..." from Rosen, pp. 86-88.

³⁵"A Rehearsall...of hainous and horrible actes committed by..." from Rosen, p. 86.

said to dwell in the almshouse and would have no money to spare, one can only assume that she would have obtained the money from the other witches in the group if the incident did in fact occur. These activities would indicate a fairly developed and cohesive group. There is no real proof that this association actually existed, but even the fact that it occurred to Stile to invent such a group suggests that some notion of witches acting cooperatively did exist in the minds of the English even before the influence of Continental belief spread. As Thomas points out, such occasions "seem to have been literally picnics by comparison with their continental counterparts," but the relative mildness of the meetings might be an indicator that the notion of the gathering of witches found in England was not simply a derivative of educated or Continental beliefs, but rather a concept that was already present in English witchcraft belief.³⁶

Though the incident at Windsor was one of the very few cases in which the existence of an association was explicitly articulated, many other accounts contain a seemingly unconscious assumption that witches were part of an informal association and that witches were somehow connected. This affinity was not a formal alliance, like the one at Windsor where the witches actually agreed to work together to cause harm, but rather a loose, unspoken confederation of witches. There was a kind of give-and-take, borrowing-and-lending between witches in the same locality. There also appears to be an assumption that the practitioners of magic in the community knew what the others were doing. The concept of a connection or association among witches becomes apparent early in the popular literature. In "The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde..." from 1566, Elizabeth Francis claimed to have given away her familiar, a white spotted cat called "Sathan," to Mother Waterhouse in return for a cake.³⁷ Another

³⁶Thomas, p. 445.

³⁷John Phillips, "The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex before the Quenes majesties Judges" (London, 1566) in Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England 1558-1618* (Amherst, MA, 1969) pp. 75-76.

example occurs in the series of trials at St. Osyth in the county of Essex in 1582. One examinee, Ursula Kemp, claims that one of her neighbors took away her familiar spirits and used them.³⁸ At a later point, Kemp "went to the said Alice Newman and declared to her that Thurlow's wife and she were fallen out, and prayed the said Newman's wife to send the spirit called Titty unto her to plague the said Thurlow's wife where that thought good."³⁹ Newman loaned one of the familiars back to Kemp, who later returned it. Thus, the witches apparently traded the familiar spirits back and forth the same way they might trade a tool or implement.⁴⁰ These exchanges seem to reflect a kind of informal bartering system where witches freely borrowed back and forth from each other. Such representations of the interactions between witches clearly indicate a communal mentality present among local witches.

Other similar incidents are recorded in the St. Osyth pamphlet. Elizabeth Bennett, when asked where she acquired her familiars, replied "that one Mother Turner did send them unto her to her house."⁴¹ Margery Sammon relates that when her mother gave her familiars to her, her mother told her "'If thou wilt not keep the said spirits, then send them to Mother Pechey, for I know she is a witch and will be glad of them.'"⁴² In another instance, Alice Manfield claimed to have gotten her familiars from another women in the neighborhood, Margaret Grevell, who could no longer keep them safely hidden. Grevell gave the spirits to Manfield with the understanding that she would be allowed to use the familiars as she needed them. Manfield explained that Grevell borrowed the imps often in the time since the arrangement was made, and that it lasted for twelve years. ⁴³ Thus, the St. Osyth pamphlet contains a great many incidents that

³⁸W.W., p.116.

³⁹W.W., "A true and just Recorde" pp.116-117.

⁴⁰For more detailed information about familiars, see chapter III.

⁴¹W.W., "A true and just Recorde" p. 125.

⁴²W.W., "A true and just Recorde" p. 128.

⁴³W.W., "A true and just Recorde" pp. 137-138.

hint at cooperative relationships between witches in the area as they borrow and lend familiars and perform small services for one another.

Another incident which suggests cooperation among witches of a community is reported in a 1612 account of the trial of the witches of Northamptonshire. The pamphlet reports that three witches, Agnes Brown, Katherine Gardiner, and Joan Lucas "did ride one night to a place not above a mile off called Ravensthorpe, all upon a sow's back, to see one Mother Rhodes, an old witch that dwelt there. But before they came to her house the old witch died, and in her last cast cried out that there were three of her old friends coming to see her but they came too late..."⁴⁴ Except for the fact that they travel on a sow, there is little to distinguish them from any concerned neighbors visiting an ill and likely dying friend to offer what comfort they could and pay their last respects.

In addition to the acts of borrowing, visiting, and begging favors, there was also a sense that witches shared a connection and knew each others' business. In her published confessions from 1579, Elizabeth Francis claimed to have knowledge of the activities of two other witches, Elizabeth Lord and Mother Osborne, with whom she described only casual contact instead of close association. Nevertheless, she asserted that Lord caused the deaths of two members of the parish and that Osborne had witches marks on her hands.⁴⁵ Francis thus seemed to claim special knowledge of the activities of other witches based on her standing as a witch. Such claims constitute a standard part of the confessions recorded in the popular pamphlets from 1579. In the St. Osyth pamphlet

⁴⁴"The Witches at Northampton who were all executed at Northampton the 22 of July last 1612" in Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England 1558-1618* (Amherst, MA, 1969) p.348.

⁴⁵"A dectection of damnable driftes, prtactized by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsgorde in Essex, at the laste assizes" (1579) in Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England 1558-1618* (Amherst, MA, 1969) pp. 93-94.

alone, there were five incidents of accused witches giving evidence against other defendants in the witchcraft trials.⁴⁶

Additionally, witches frequently claimed that their familiars gave them knowledge of the activities of other witches. Ursula Kemp, when asked how she knew the names of Elizabeth Bennett's spirits, replied that one of her spirits, Tiffin, had told her.⁴⁷ She similarly asked Tiffin about other incidents and the doings of other witches, which he was usually able to answer.⁴⁸ Other witches claimed that their familiars informed them about the actions of witches in the community as well. Alice Manfield stated that her familiars told her about the bewitchments caused by another witch, Margaret Grevell.⁴⁹ Alice Hunt claimed that her imps, Jack and Robin, warned her that Ursula Kemp would betray her.⁵⁰ Familiars therefore formed part of the connection among witches in a locality.

One must be careful in drawing too many conclusions based on these claims of special knowledge. Under questioning, the accused women may have simply repeated to the magistrates the accumulated gossip of years in order to earn some leniency for themselves. Nevertheless, the fact that the magistrates apparently asked the accused witches to name others and that the witches readily did as they were asked suggests that it was commonly supposed that the witches in the community knew of others and their activities.

The pamphlets, therefore, depict the defendants engaged in an array of activities with others in their settlements and contain evidence of a moderately high degree of

⁴⁶W.W., "A true and just Recorde" pp. 107-140.

⁴⁷W.W., "A true and just Recorde" p. 118.

⁴⁸W.W., "A true and just Recorde" pp. 118-119, 133.

⁴⁹W.W., "A true and just Recorde" pp. 138-139.

⁵⁰W.W., "A true and just Recorde" p. 127.

cooperation and interconnection among them. Thus, while witches are seldom shown gathering in organized groups to cast spells or worship the devil, they are nevertheless shown to operate within the context of some sort of association of witches.

Contemporaries clearly saw witchcraft, not as a practice in which individuals engaged in isolation, but rather as an activity performed within a network.

The patterns of interactions among witches in England, however, do not follow the model of the sabbats, but rather seem to be represented in terms of social relations in small communities. The testimony of one accused witch implicating others is reminiscent, almost, of any respectable housewife sharing rumors of the misdeeds of the neighbors. The witches were thought to gossip and monitor the activities of the others in much the same way as neighbors did in a village, though the tattle was often shown to be spread by familiars rather than by neighborhood gossip. They were portrayed borrowing a familiar just as a neighbor might borrow a cup of flour, or visiting a sick witch as any good friend would. Apart from the fact that they are connected because they are engaged in similar harmful practices, the accused witches look almost like ordinary neighbors. The activities of witches, then, were represented as parallels of the activities of the respectable community, even though the witches were drawn together for disreputable purposes.

When the accused witches crafted their confessions, they drew not on learned notions about sabbats, but rather on their own experiences, how they acted as neighbors. The concepts of "community" and "neighborliness" were so ingrained into the minds of individuals in early modern England that no one, not magistrates, pamphleteers, witnesses, nor even the accused themselves, could conceive of witches existing outside the context of some sort of community. They likely constructed the concept of a "community of witches" around the societal expectations with which they were already familiar. The confessions, testimony, and commentaries printed in the pamphlets represented witches as engaged in familiar activities, sharing and borrowing possessions,

gossiping, and monitoring each other's activities, because those were the kinds of social interactions with which everyone was familiar. The witches' community therefore came to reflect the patterns of village "neighborliness".

The representations of witches sharing connections with one another may also have resulted partly from the interpretations of the pamphlet writers. In the preface of "A Rehearsall both straung and true, of hainous and horrible acts committed by...Fowre notorious Witches, apprehended at Winsore...", the author writes "Among the punishments which the Lord God hath laid upon us, for the manifest impiety and careless contempt of His word abounding in these our desperate days, the swarms of witches and enchanters are not the last nor the least."⁵¹ His purpose in reporting the trial is, at least partly, to make society aware and fearful of the threat posed by witches. The notion of an organized group of witches would undoubtedly be more threatening than that of a few isolated witches here and there. The pamphleteers may, either consciously or unconsciously, have imposed a distorted version of the community structure onto the witches.

Historians have shown that accused witches were not isolated, but rather regularly interacted with others in their villages or parrishes. They were involved in the economic transactions of their settlements, working within the homes of their neighbors, and living within families. Their activities suggest that they lived rather ordinary lives before they were accused of witchcraft. Yet at the same time, the narratives also represented the defendants as parts of a community of witches, sharing connections to one another. The network of witches, while similar in structure to the licit neighborhood, served evil ends and therefore stood almost in opposition to the village community. The witches, however, were shown to interact in both simultaneously, suggesting that the witches' community existed parallel to the village society and was interwoven with it,

⁵¹"A Rehearsall both strange and true," p. 84.

rather than on its own, outside the bounds of the legitimate community. Accused witches, therefore, were represented in the popular pamphlets not as isolated, but rather as members of communities on two levels, one as an accepted part of the village, and the other as a part of a network of witches.

III. Witches and Families

Studies of witchcraft in early modern England have focused primarily upon the social dynamics of witchcraft accusations, the tensions which may have encouraged the sharp rise of witchcraft prosecutions during the period. Clearly, changes within the society and strains within the community were a major cause for the rise of witchcraft accusations within the courts. Less emphasis, however, has been placed upon the possibility that witchcraft in many cases may have reflected serious tensions within the family. James Sharpe points out that much of the alleged activity of witches occurred within the domestic sphere and often involved healing or the harm of children.⁵² Other scholars like Deborah Willis and Robin Briggs have demonstrated the significant presence of mother-imagery in witchcraft beliefs. Popular contemporary pamphlets suggest that witchcraft beliefs in some respects reflected, and often distorted, societal notions of the family. For example, witchcraft was usually thought to be learned by witches from a mother, grandmother, sister, or other relative, paralleling the way in which a daughter learned domestic skills from her mother or a son learned a trade from his father. In addition, families were often presented as practicing witchcraft, not usually as a group, but rather as a sort of unit, seemingly free from the rivalries found between other witches in the community. The pamphlets also hint, however, at familial tensions behind several cases. One of the most common expressions of strain within the family is the frequent and apparently voluntary evidence given by relatives against the witch. Additionally, witches sometimes admit to harming or killing close family members, usually husbands or children, in their confessions. This indicates that, even if the

⁵²James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, University of Pennsylvania Press (Philadelphia, 1996) pp. 174-177.

testimony was coerced, that the witches felt enough anxiety within the home that killing near relatives was a plausible and even logical crime for a witch to commit.

Recent studies of the connections between family and witchcraft have emphasized the imagery of motherhood that pervades the witchcraft accusations. In *Malevolent Nurture*, Deborah Willis argues that the conception of women as mothers in early modern England was central to notions of witchcraft and that "witchcraft beliefs encode fantasies of maternal persecution."⁵³ She suggests that witches were seen as women who used their power of nurture maliciously against neighbors, and that the fear of witches derived from individuals' fear of returning to a child-like role and being powerless against the force of an older woman.⁵⁴ Robin Briggs also notes a "central preoccupation with maternal function in witchcraft beliefs."⁵⁵ He proposes psychological grounds for the witchcraft prosecutions. Young men might feel a need to detach and disassociate themselves from the mother figure, which leads to hostile behavior towards these older women, who come to represent a sort of "universal" mother figure.⁵⁶ In addition, Briggs suggests that illness or weakness may cause infantile anger towards the mother, who failed to completely center upon the needs and wishes of the child, to reassert itself in an individual. The mother comes to represent to the individual "external will", an uncontrollable, and perhaps incomprehensible, outside force. These feelings may easily turn the invalid's thoughts to witchcraft, creating a link between motherhood and witchcraft, which causes the latter to become highly gendered.⁵⁷ He also suggests that witches were seen as "bad mothers at one remove" who harmed the

⁵³Deborah Willis, *Malevolent Nurture*, Cornell University Press (New York, 1995) pp. 6-7.

⁵⁴Willis, pp. 13-15.

⁵⁵Robin Briggs, *Witches & Neighbors: The Social and Culteral Context of European Witchcraft* (New York, 1996) p. 166.

⁵⁶Briggs, p. 166.

⁵⁷Briggs, pp. 166-167.

children of other women out of malice when they should have been nurturing their own.⁵⁸ Images of motherhood, and by extension family, were therefore an integral part of witchcraft beliefs in early modern England.

The popular pamphlets seem to suggest other ways, in addition to the inversion of the role of the mother, that familial relations and roles were reflected in witchcraft beliefs. Family was seen to have a major role in the transmission of the knowledge and practice of witchcraft from one generation to the next. The vast majority of witches, in their confessions, claimed to have learned their witchcraft skills from a member of their family. Most commonly, witchcraft was passed from mother to daughter, but in other cases the knowledge came from another family member, such as a grandmother or sister, or in some very rare cases, passed from father to daughter or from mother to son. In a 1566 pamphlet concerning the witches at Chelmsford, Elizabeth Francis began her confession by explaining how she came to be a witch. She explained "first, she learned this art of witchcraft at the age of 12 years, of her grandmother..."⁵⁹ In the same pamphlet, Joan Waterhouse explained how "her mother this last winter would have learned her this art, but she leaned it not," but after watching her mother command her familiar, used the familiar to torment a girl against whom she has a grudge.⁶⁰ These confessions show that, from the earliest recorded cases, it was common for a witch to learn her craft from her mother. Joan Vaugan also was said to have learned her trade from her mother, Agnes Brown; the author comments that "this Joan was so well brought up under her elbow that she hanged with her for company under her mother's nose."⁶¹

⁵⁸Briggs, p. 241.

⁵⁹"The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde in the Countie of Essex before the Quenes majesties Judges, the XXVI daye of July Anno 1566" (London, 1566) in Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England 1558-1618* (Amherst, MA, 1969) p. 73.

⁶⁰"The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde..." (1589) in Rosen p. 77.

⁶¹"The Witches of Northamptonshire Who were all executed at Northampton the 22 of July last, 1612" (London, 1612) in Rosen, p. 344.

Both Alice Hunt and Margery Sammon claimed to have received their familiar spirits and learned to control them from their mother, Mother Barnes, just before she died.⁶² Arthur Bill was said to be the son of two witches, "and he (like a gracious child) would not degenerate, nor suffer himself to stray from his father's wicked counsels, but carefully trod the steps that he had devilishly taught him."⁶³ Thus, in this case, knowledge of witchcraft was thought to have passed from father to son. Similarly, in the case of the Windsor witches, among those implicated was "one Father Rosimond dwelling in Farnham parish, being a widower, and also a daughter of his, are both witches or enchanters..."⁶⁴ In this case the connection is not articulated, but there seems to be almost a tacit assumption that Father Rosimond taught his skills to his daughter. In Lancashire, Elizabeth Southern was reported to have "brought up her own children, instructed her grandchildren, and took great care and pains to bring them to be witches."⁶⁵ Additionally, in the case of the Flower sisters in 1618, it is assumed, though never actually stated, that Margaret and Phillipa Flower learned witchcraft from their mother Joan.⁶⁶ Knowledge of witchcraft, then, was usually thought to pass from mother to daughter, though some variations did occur.

Clive Holmes argues that this pattern suggests that in the popular conception of witchcraft in England, witchcraft powers were thought to be passed through blood relationship, in a matrilineal line; he also makes the ancillary assumption that witchcraft was thought to be hereditary, inherited from kin.⁶⁷ The language of the pamphlets

⁶²W.W., "A true and just Recorde, of the Information, Examination and Confession of all the Witches, taken at S. Oses..." (London, 1582) in Rosen, pp. 127-128.

⁶³"The Witches of Northamptonshire...", p. 349.

⁶⁴"A Rehearsall both straung and true, of hainous and horrible actes committed by Elizabeth Stile..." in Rosen, p. 85.

⁶⁵Thomas Potts, esq. "The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster" (London, 1613) in Rosen, p. 358.

⁶⁶"The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillipa Flower" (London, 1619), in Rosen, pp.371-383.

⁶⁷Clive Holmes, "Popular Culture? Witches, Magistrates, and Divines in Early Modern

suggests, however, that witchcraft was not thought to be inherited through blood, but rather learned from family members, in much the same way a daughter would learn domestic skills from her mother or a son would learn a trade from his father. Arthur Bill's father "devilishly taught him" witchcraft and gave him "wicked counsels" rather than simply passing witchcraft on to him.⁶⁸ Elizabeth Southernns "instructed" her children and "brought them up" to be witches.⁶⁹ Thus, witchcraft was not simply a hereditary power. It was a skill that needed to be learned and passed on, each generation teaching the next. Family was seen to have a crucial role in the continuance of witchcraft. Witchcraft, therefore, was seen as destructive skill that was taught in families in the same manner that useful skills and trades were taught. Notions about witchcraft reflected the role of family in the larger community.

Another reflection of the role of family in the larger community, found in discussions of witchcraft, is the ideal of family loyalty and the notions that witches from the same family worked, not necessarily together on the same bewitchment, but in some way cooperatively. In recounting the history of the Pendle forest witches in Lancashire, Anne Llewellyn Barstow presents the two rival families, headed respectively by Old Demdyke and Old Chattox, as units that worked as groups to earn livings through begging and also through the sale of charms and curses.⁷⁰ Barstow describes how family loyalties broke down in prison, with members of each family accusing each other as well as members of the rival family; she argues that fear in the face of judicial action combined with years of poverty and rejection by the community left the families weak

England" in Steven L. Kaplan, ed. *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1984).

⁶⁸"The Witches of Northamptonshire...", p. 349.

⁶⁹Potts, p. 358.

⁷⁰Anne Llewellyn Barstow, *Witchcraze*, HarperCollins (London, 1994) pp. 41-47.

and vulnerable to outside attack.⁷¹ This argument assumes that there is some sense of unity, some loyalty within "witch families," to be broken down.

Other pamphlets show a similar family loyalty, though perhaps to a lesser degree. Witches were often thought to have afflicted certain individuals in retribution for a slight or abuse of a family member. Ellen Smith, for example, was said to have caused the daughter of a neighbor to languish and eventually die after the girl was involved in a heated dispute with Smith's own daughter.⁷² Similarly, Mother Nokes was reported to have caused a servant boy to have a fit after the young man snatched her daughter's gloves to tease her.⁷³ Robert Sannever claimed that Elizabeth Eustace caused him to have a seizure after he abused her daughter, who was employed as a servant in his house.⁷⁴ There are quite a few similar incidents recounted in the pamphlets, and these episodes suggest that revenging wrongs done to family members was seen as a prime motivation for witches. There are fewer instances of family members actually working spells together. Elizabeth Stile implied in her confession that Father Rosimond worked magic cooperatively with one of his daughters.⁷⁵ Arthur Bill and his mother "both joined together and bewitched a round ball" in order to silence Bill's father.⁷⁶ Elizabeth Southern testified that she saw old Chattox making clay figures with the help of her daughter, Anne Redfern.⁷⁷ These examples suggest that family loyalty and cooperation were perceived as an element of witchcraft.

⁷¹Barstow, pp. 45-47.

⁷²"A Detection of damnable driftes, practized by three Witches arraigned at at Chelmsforde, in Essex, at the laste Assises there holden, which were executed in Aprill 1579," (1579) in Rosen, p. 95.

⁷³"A Detection of damnable driftes...", p. 98.

⁷⁴W.W., p.130.

⁷⁵"A Rehearsall both straung and true...", pp. 85-86.

⁷⁶"The witches of Northamptonshire...", p. 350.

⁷⁷"The Wonderfull Dicoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster," p.360.

Witchcraft was seen, therefore, to reflect the societal expectations about family, even if in a distorted fashion. Witchcraft was thought to be learned from family members in the same way domestic skills or trades were, and there was perhaps some notion that the family of witches should have the same cohesion and loyalty that a "normal" family was thought to share. At the same time, however, the pamphleteers seemed to emphasize the ways in which familial relations were strained and hostile between the accused witch and other members of her or his family. They record numerous cases in which evidence against the accused witch was given by close members of his or her family. Often it was the witch's own children who gave damning evidence against her. Moreover, the witches' own confessions often suggest serious breaches in the harmony of the family, as they claimed responsibility for the death of a close relative. Thus, the pamphlets exhibit a strange inconsistency on the subject of witches' familial relations: on one hand, the witch was portrayed in terms that reflect the norms of familial expectations in early modern English society, while on the other, the witch was shown failing to achieve the harmony and solidarity that was the ideal of family.

The numerous recorded instances of witnesses accusing near relatives of witchcraft intimates the presence of serious tensions within the families of these witches. The most common form these accusations took was to have a child implicate his or her mother in the practice of witchcraft. In "The examination and confession of certaine Wythes at Chensforde...", eighteen year old Joan Waterhouse confessed that her mother, Agnes, wanted to teach her witchcraft, and that Agnes kept a familiar in the shape of a toad which she called Sathan.⁷⁸ One of the witnesses against Ursula Kempt of St. Osyth was Thomas Rabbet, her own eight year old base-born son, who testified that Kemp kept four spirits, that she associated with other alleged witches, and that he had overheard

⁷⁸"The examination and confession of certain wythes at Chelmsforde...", p. 77.

them speaking of various bewitchments.⁷⁹ Phoebe Hunt attested that she had seen her step-mother, Alice, feeding two familiars like small horses milk in a bowl.⁸⁰ In one peculiar case, Henry Sellis and his brother, John, testified against both of their parents, claiming not only to have seen imps and familiar spirits around the house and to have heard their parents talk about them, but also to have been grabbed by one of their mother's imps.⁸¹ Janet Device, nine years old, testified to seeing her mother, Elizabeth, with a familiar and to hearing about various bewitchments in which her mother was involved.⁸² Her brother James, after some resistance, testified to witnessing on a three separate occasions the gathering of many individuals involved in witchcraft at his grandmother's house for feasts to celebrate various events.⁸³ The testimony of young children against their mothers was a common and integral element of popular pamphlets throughout the period, and it is among the most disturbing.

This evidence was undoubtedly coaxed or coerced from bewildered and frightened children by magistrates through leading questions and possibly threats. Though the testimony itself is suspect, however, the fact that the pamphleteers frequently chose to include such testimony is significant. They chose to write about certain cases rather than others, and included some testimony while leaving other evidence out. The process of writing the pamphlets was selective, yet most pamphlet writers chose to incorporate the evidence given by the witches' children in some detail. Such evidence is most likely included in order to suggest that the witches' acts were so terrible that they turned even the witches' own children against them, disrupting the normal ties of blood.

⁷⁹W. W., pp. 109-110.

⁸⁰W. W., p. 122.

⁸¹W. W., pp. 132-134.

⁸²Potts, pp. 364-366.

⁸³Potts, pp. 367-368.

Both the horror of witchcraft and the disruptive effects of such activities are thus highlighted within the pamphlets.

Other testimony against the accused witches recounted in the pamphlets also came from close family members, but this evidence, from older and presumably less vulnerable witnesses, is harder to explain. John Chandler testified before his death, that he argued with his step-daughter, Ellen Smith, and "that after the same hour that she had said so unto him, he never ate any meat that digested in him, but ever it came up again as soon as it was down, by which means he consumed and wasted away to his death."⁸⁴ This accusation took place in the context of a disagreement over money, suggesting that Chandler's accusations were a culmination of a long dispute. In another case, Lawrence Kemp testified against his sister, Ursula. Kemp testified:

...that his late wife was taken in her back and in the privy parts of her body in a very extreme and most strange sort, and so continued about three quarters of a year, and then died; and he saith, that his said wife did tell him several times that Ursula Kemp his sister had forspoke her, and that she was the only cause of her sickness.⁸⁵

Kemp reports his wife's suspicions of his sister's involvement in her illness, but does not seem to press the charges forcefully himself. In the case of Arthur Bill, his father became the primary witness against him. The pamphleteer writes:

..fearing that his old father would relent, and so haply confess that which might be prejudicial unto him, [he] sent for his mother to come unto him, to whom bewraying his mind, they both joined together and bewitched a round ball into the throat of the father, were it continued a great while, his father not being able to speak a work.
Howbeit the ball was afterward had out, and his father proved the

word?

⁸⁴"A detection of damnable driftes, practized by three Witches arrainged at Chelmsforde in Essex, at the laste assizes" (1579) in Rosen, p.94.

⁸⁵W.W., p. 144.

principal witness against him.⁸⁶

This passage suggests the awareness that the testimony of those closest to the accused witch was likely to be the most damaging. It also indicates, however, that the notion of a near family member giving evidence against the accused was not unthinkable; it was a fear, and all the more frightening because it was entirely possible, perhaps even likely. These instances indicate that, ideals of harmony within the household aside, it was believed that damning evidence against witches might come from within their own household, and it was not only young and easily influenced children who might give such testimony.

The instances of relations giving evidence against family members suggests that there were familial tensions finding their expression in the witchcraft trials. The testimony of children might be suspect, but the cases of older family members giving such evidence cannot be as easily explained. Moreover, there is a suggestive hint of a pattern in some of the episodes: much of the evidence from adult family members came from relatives by marriage rather than blood relatives. The impetus for Lawrence Kemp's testimony against his sister Ursula clearly came from his late wife. The pamphlet implies that relations between Ursula Kemp and her sister-in-law had always been tense, and the initial suspicions that Ursula caused the illness of her brother's wife came from her sister-in-law herself.⁸⁷ Thus, the allegations Kemp made before the magistrates in fact originated with his late wife, Ursula's sister in law. Likewise, John Chandler's testimony against Ellen Smith, his step-daughter, was probably prompted by their disagreement over the dispensation of some money left by Chandler's wife.⁸⁸

Frances E. Dolan argues that many of the tensions within families in the early modern period in England resulted from attempts to create "blended" families out of

⁸⁶"The Witches of Northamptonshire," p. 350.

⁸⁷W.W., p. 144.

⁸⁸"A detection of damnable driftes...", p. 94.

individuals related only by marriage. She suggests that such families were seen as "anti-families", problematic in that they were created through bonds of marriage rather than blood.⁸⁹ Testimonies of individuals against their relatives-by-marriage may be one manifestation of the strain present in such families.

Another sign of familial tensions expressed in the witchcraft proceedings lies within the witches' own confessions. Many of the accused witches confessed, apparently of their own accord, to killing or injuring near relatives. Elizabeth Francis claimed that after she married her husband and they had a daughter together "they lived not so quietly as she desired, being stirred, as she said, to much unquietness, and moved to swearing and cursing; wherefore she willed Satan her cat to kill the child...and when she found not the quietness that she desired, she willed it to lay a lameness in the leg of this Francis her husband..."⁹⁰ In this confession, Francis both admitted to being discontent in her marriage and directly linked her discontent to the death of her child and injury of her husband. Mother Waterhouse also testified that "because she lived somewhat unquietly with her husband, she caused Satan to kill him..."⁹¹ In a less explicit account, Alice Manfield reported, second hand, that Mother Grevell said that she "did plague her husband, whereof he died..."⁹² Grevell never remarried, hinting perhaps that this was another case of a witch claiming to have done away with an unsatisfactory husband. In the confession of Ursula Kemp, the pamphleteer writes "...this examinee, without any asking, of her own free will at that present, confessed and said, that she was the death of her brother Kemp's wife, and that she sent the spirit Jack to plague her, for that her sister

⁸⁹Francis E. Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars*, Cornell University Press, (New York, 1994) p. 230.

⁹⁰"The examination and confession of certaine wythes at Chelmsforde...", p. 75.

⁹¹"The examination and confession of certaine wythes at Chelmsforde...", p. 76.

⁹²W. W., p. 140.

had called her 'whore' and 'witch'."⁹³ This was undoubtedly a charged relationship, and Kemp probably was quite relieved when her sister-in-law died.

These accounts reveal the types of tensions that were probably found in many households, and the discontent felt by many wives. While it is somewhat unlikely that these women were actually responsible for the acts for which they claimed credit, these confessions may indicate what the women would have *liked* to do, if they were able. It is interesting that in these confessions, the alleged witches usually claimed to have harmed the very closest members of their household, their husbands and children, in contrast to the incidents where relatives, usually relatives by marriage, gave information against accused witches. The confessions probably result from a combination of the awareness of discontent and disharmony within the home and guilt and uneasiness over sudden and inexplicable illnesses and deaths. The narratives then, illustrate the types of tensions found within the household to which most individuals would never admit. It is possible that only when these women faced charges of being witches, who were by their nature thought to be disruptive and out of harmony with the community, could they admit to familial strains within the household.

The pamphlet accounts display mixed attitudes towards the relations between witches and their families. On one side, there are images of "witch families" in which members are bound by the same loyalties which were ideally thought to be present in "normal" families. There is also the notion of witches passing on their skills to the next generation of their kin, in much the same way fathers would pass their trade on to their sons and mothers would teach domestic knowledge to their daughters. Such imagery closely parallels the accepted ideals about the nature and role of family in early modern England.

⁹³W.W., p. 115.

On the other side, however, there is evidence of familial tension, "dysfunction", to use the modern terminology. Perhaps these inconsistent portrayals of family relations between witches and their kin resulted from the struggle between the writer's culturally ingrained notions about the harmonious nature of the family and the reality of familial strains which encroach through the evidence of the witchcraft proceedings. The pamphleteers and the participants may attempt to make sense of the apparent tensions within the families by attributing the strains to the disrupting and divisive influence of witches.

IV. Witches and Familiars

The presence of familiar spirits, or imps, is one of the most central elements of witchcraft trials and literature in early modern England. Familiars are mentioned in the great majority of trial records and other documents. Moreover, it is an element almost unique to England, being very seldom included in any of the Continental witchcraft trials or writings. In spite of the central position familiars occupy in English witchcraft, however, they are largely ignored by scholars. The perceived nature of the familiars too often seems to be taken for granted. Jim Sharpe points out that the familiar is a key concept in English witchcraft which has been sadly under-researched.⁹⁴ The familiars play a central role in many of the popular pamphlets, and the manner in which the imps are portrayed in these publications may lend some insight into the way they were regarded by contemporaries. The representation of familiars in the pamphlets seems to support Sharpe's contention that familiar spirits comprised a demonic element in English witchcraft well before educated views began to permeate all levels of society.⁹⁵ The pamphlets show changes in the relationship between witches and their familiars over time, as learned witchcraft beliefs were synthesized with the popular understanding of witchcraft. Moreover, the pamphlets characterize the familiar in interesting ways, crediting them with surprising independence and agency as well as incredible malice.

Clive Holmes defines familiars simply as "the creatures kept by the witch...and employed to execute her designs."⁹⁶ Familiars, otherwise referred to as "spirits" or

⁹⁴Jim Sharpe, "The Devil in East Anglia" in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe, Studies in Culture and Belief*, Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts, eds. (Cambridge, 1996) p. 248.

⁹⁵*ibid*

⁹⁶Clive Holmes, "Witches, Magistrates, and Divines" from Steven L. Kaplan, ed. *Understanding Popular Culture: Europe from the Middle Ages to the Nineteenth Century*

"imps", were thought to be evil spirits or demons who took the form of small animals, usually given to the witch by either the Devil or her teacher to fulfill the witch's commands.

In return for the use of the familiar's powers, the witch was expected to feed and house the imp. Most often, the witches were said to keep their familiars in a basket or pot lined with wool, and feed them with bread and milk.⁹⁷ In other confessions, witches claimed that familiar spirits simply appeared to them periodically and asked their bidding.⁹⁸

Additionally, the familiars usually demanded blood from the witch, either at the outset of their association or in return for each service performed.

Though the modern image of a witch's familiar is a black cat, the nature of these familiars varied widely from case to case. While the familiar who played such a large part in the earliest Chelmsford case recorded by a pamphleteer was indeed a cat, though a spotted white one, cats were by no means the only, or even predominant, form of animal familiar.⁹⁹ During the same trial, Mother Waterhouse claimed to have turned the cat into a toad, and her daughter testified that when she called her mother's familiar, it came to her "in the likeness of a great dog."¹⁰⁰ In the St. Osyth witch trials, the accused were purported to have harbored familiars in a variety of forms, and many admitted to the charges, some even naming the familiars and their characteristics in detail. Thomas Rabbet claimed that his mother, Ursula Kemp, kept four familiars. Two, he testified, were cats, one grey and one black, one was a white lamb, and the last was a black toad.¹⁰¹ Alice Hunt was said to have two little imps in the shape of horses, one black,

(New York, 1984) p. 97.

⁹⁷See Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, pp.74, 112, 118, 128, 138, 184.

⁹⁸See Rosen, pp. 93, 122-123, 186-188, 360, 363-363, 372.

⁹⁹"The examination and confession of certain wytyches at Chemsford in the Countie of Essex, begore the Quenes Majesties Judges, the xxvi days of July, Anno 1565 at the Assizes" (London, 1566) in Rosen, pp.73-81.

¹⁰⁰"The examination and confession of certain wytyches at Chemsford..." in Rosen, p. 77.

¹⁰¹W. W., "A true and just Record of the Information, Examination, and Confession of all the Witches, taken at St. Osyth in the Conty of Essex" (London, 1582) in Rosen, pp. 109-110.

one white, which she kept in a small earthen pot.¹⁰² Mother Bennet was reported to associate with a black familiar shaped like a dog and a red spirit like a lion.¹⁰³ The Sellis children, in testifying against their parents, said that their mother kept two spirits which she called "Imps"; they described the creatures only by saying that they had eyes as big as the youngest child.¹⁰⁴ Agnes Dowsing testified that her mother, Agnes Herd, kept twelve familiars, six like speckled blackbirds and six like cows the size of large rats.¹⁰⁵

Other popular pamphlets reflect a similar diversity in the nature of familiars. Joan Cunny admitted to keeping a series of familiar spirits, in the shapes of frogs, toads, and moles.¹⁰⁶ Joan Prentice claimed to have been tempted by a spirit in the form of a ferret with firey eyes.¹⁰⁷ Alice Samuel of Warboys was accused of, and admitted to, suckling a dun chicken, which was said to torment local children.¹⁰⁸ According to the confession of Elizabeth Southern of Pendle Forest, a spirit appeared to her "in the shape of a boy, the one half of his coat black and the other brown."¹⁰⁹ According to a 1619 pamphlet, the Devil promised the Flower women of Lincoln that they would be attended "in such pretty forms of dog, cat, or rat..."¹¹⁰ The shapes that could be assumed by

¹⁰²W.W., p. 122.

¹⁰³W.W., p. 188.

¹⁰⁴W.W., p. 133.

¹⁰⁵W.W., p. 152.

¹⁰⁶"The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches, arraigned and by justice condemned at Chelmes-forde, in the Countye of Essex the 5 day of Iulye, last past 1589" (1589) in Rosen, pp. 185-186.

¹⁰⁷"The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches..." in Rosen, pp. 186-188.

¹⁰⁸"The most strange and admirable discovery of the three witches of Warboys, arraigend, convicted and executed last Assizes at Huntingdon" (London, 1593) in Rosen, p. 279.

¹⁰⁹Thomas Potts, esq., "The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster" (London, 1613) in Rosen, p. 358.

¹¹⁰"The Wonderful Discover of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillipa Flower, daughters of Joan Flowere neere Dever Castle, executed at Lincolne March 11, 1618[1619]" (London, 1619) in Rosen, p. 372.

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familiars were thought to be almost limitless, from something as common as toad or rat, to a form as exotic as a small lion. Even a white lamb, usually associated with Christ and the Church, could be perceived as a supernatural associate of a witch, as in the case of Ursula Kemp.¹¹¹ The role of familiar, therefore, was apparently not restricted to certain types of animals perceived as base or evil, but rather could be filled by a variety of creatures, even children or valuable and generally benign livestock such as horses and cows. The distinction was usually carefully made, however, that these were not normal animals, but rather supernatural spirits appearing in animal form, often distinguished by a smaller size or an unusual color. of

The witnesses and accused witches frequently characterized the familiars in some detail. They were often carefully distinguished by color and type, and usually named. Though in some cases imps were simply called Satan,¹¹² they were usually called by short names that sound reminiscent of those given to pets. Ursula Kemp's familiars, for example, were said to be called Tiffin, Titty, Piggins, and Jack.¹¹³ Other common sorts of names included Leird, Suckin, Bid, Pluck, Catch, White, and Ball.¹¹⁴ Keith Thomas suggests that a name was one of the major features of a pet during the early modern period.¹¹⁵ He proposes, moreover, that the names were short and only semi-human, emphasizing the distance between man and animal, and were often descriptive of the bearer.¹¹⁶ The names given to the familiars, therefore, seem to be consistent with those given to pets. This is suggestive, intimating that the witches, at least, may have conceived of familiars as a kind of magical pet. Some accused witches described, in their confessions, appearances and attributes of their familiars in some detail. Kemp, for

¹¹¹W.W., pp. 109-110.

¹¹²See Rosen, pp. 74, 186.

¹¹³W.W., p. 109.

¹¹⁴See Rosen, pp. 118, 187, 295, 365.

¹¹⁵Keith Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, (New York, 1983) pp. 113-114.

¹¹⁶*ibid*

instance, confessed "that she had four spirits, whereof two of them were he's and the other two were she's; the two he-spirits were to punish and kill unto death, and the other two she's were to punish with lameness and other diseases of bodily harm, and also to destroy cattle."¹¹⁷ Kemp, therefore, thought enough about the nature of her putative familiars that she even differentiated their powers along gendered lines. Thus, not only did familiars come in a variety of forms, they were often personified with names and specific characteristics. ✓

Holmes allows that a main element of popular belief in England was the notion that a witch's power derived from her ability to harness and command the forces of the animal world, but does not explore the nature of the familiars themselves. He instead concentrates on the manner in which familiars were integrated into the more learned, continental beliefs and utilizes the evolution of the familiar as an example of the dialogue between popular and educated conceptions of witchcraft. His argument is that the religious zealots were uncomfortable and embarrassed by the notion of animal familiars, but imps were such a pervasive element of English witchcraft that the divines were ultimately forced to incorporate animal spirits into the learned witchcraft as "devils" corrupting the witch to serve Satan.¹¹⁸ Holmes ignores the nature of the imps themselves as represented in the trials and pamphlets. Most scholars apparently accept the same judgment of familiar spirits expressed by Holmes. he
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Sharpe, however, argues that the prevalence of familiars in popular witchcraft in England suggests the presence of a diabolic element long before the influence of continental witchcraft beliefs penetrated small towns and villages.¹¹⁹ Though the identification between Satan and familiars became more complete and the "imps" were

¹¹⁷W.W., p. 115.

¹¹⁸Holmes, "Witches, Magistrates, and Divines," pp. 97-98.

¹¹⁹James Sharpe, *Instruments of Darkness*, (Philadelphia, 1996) pp. 71-73; "The devil in East Anglia" p. 248.

more consciously vilified in the later pamphlets which were more influenced by the learned, educated notions of witchcraft, familiars displayed "demon-like" characteristics from the earliest pamphlets: they were malicious, unreliable, and difficult for the witch to control. This demonic aspect of familiars ran counter to the less educated, popular notions of witchcraft in which the focus was exclusively on local *maleficium* rather than any pact with the devil or any other evil spirits.

The pamphlets, moreover, represented the familiar spirits showing unexpected initiative and independence. This raises questions about the power relationship between the witch and her familiar. Though most scholars accept the notion that imps were considered little more than instruments through which witches could inflict harm, the pamphlets portray relationships in which the familiars tempted, exploited, victimized, and ultimately betrayed the witches who commanded them. Thus, the familiars are characterized as actively evil and diabolical in themselves rather than as passive instruments of the witches.

Some scholars have proposed that charges that someone kept a familiar frequently resulted when a member of the community developed an unusually close relationship with an animal. During the early modern period, theologians emphasized the boundary between man and animal, arguing that distance should be strictly maintained; Keith Thomas claims, however, that in smaller, rural communities such a distance was impossible in practice, and that villages accepted a certain closeness between humans and animals.¹²⁰ During roughly the same time span that witchcraft trials were at their height, from about 1560 to the early seventeenth century, the keeping of pets was gradually becoming acceptable. In 1521, a judge denied that a tamed animal whose only purpose was to give pleasure could be considered property, but by 1588 laws were passed

¹²⁰ Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp.36-41, pp. 93- 120.

that classified tame dogs kept as pets as property.¹²¹ Thus, witchcraft trials and the associated accusations of women keeping familiars occurred during a time when the relationship between humans and domesticated animals was being re-evaluated.

Thomas suggests that the creatures alleged to be a witch's "familiars" might have been either domestic pets or "uninvited animal companions" whose relationship with the accused was misinterpreted when charges were leveled against her.¹²² He claims animal pets were "morally suspect" and that an *unconventional* pet, such as a toad or a weasel, might be identified as a witches' familiar.¹²³ This implies that while the presence of an animal in a house might have drawn attention to the resident, the gradual acceptance of "pets" meant that neighbors might not automatically assume the individual was a witch. The presence of some kind of "pet" in the house could be supplementary evidence, but in itself did not necessarily mark an individual as a witch.

In spite of the argument that the concept of familiars was slowly and reluctantly incorporated into the learned beliefs by divines, the association between familiar spirits and Satan, or at least some dark power beyond the witch, is apparent in the very earliest popular pamphlets. In "The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chensforde...", the accused witch, Elizabeth Francis, claimed to have begun her career in witchcraft upon receiving a familiar from her grandmother. The pamphlet reports that "when she taught it her, she counselled her to renounce GOD and His word, and to give of her blood to Sathan (as she termed it), which she delivered her in the likeness of a white spotted cat, and taught her to feed the said cat with bread and milk, and she did so. Also she taught her to call it by the name of Sathan, and to keep in a basket."¹²⁴ Even in

¹²¹Thomas, *Man and the Natural World*, pp. 110-120.

¹²²Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (New York, 1971) p. 525.

¹²³Thomas, *Man and the Natural World* p.40.

¹²⁴"The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chelmsforde in the Countie of Essex, before the Quenes Majesties Judges..." in Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, pp 73-74.

this earliest pamphlet, there is already a definite, articulated relationship between the familiar and the Devil. The cat's name and the fact that Francis claims that Satan, or at least his powers, were given to her in the *likeness* of a cat indicate clearly that she believed the familiar to be a representative of the Devil.

By 1582, beliefs about the association between familiar imps and Satan had already developed further. During the trials at St. Osyth, one of the accused, Elizabeth Bennett, related that two spirits, Suckin and Leird, tried to tempt her to follow them and renounce God. She claimed that she resisted their blandishments and repeatedly reaffirmed her faith in God, and that they then became physically abusive, grabbing at her coat and legs and burning her arm. These evil spirits continued to appear to her, alternately cajoling and battering Bennett until they finally approached her at a weak moment after she had an argument with her neighbors, and she sent them to torment the neighbors cows.¹²⁵ In this narrative, the familiars are not merely passive instruments or embodiments of Satan, but rather active recruiters attempting to tempt or batter the examinee into witchcraft. Moreover, Bennett obviously believed the spirits to be minions of the Devil, because she prayed to God and invoked the name of the Holy Ghost in order to get rid of them. Further, she apparently considered the imps a torment; she claimed "that one Mother Turner did send them unto her house (as she thinketh) for that she had denied the said Mother Turner of milk."¹²⁶ This narrative clearly illustrates the development of beliefs regarding the relationship between familiar spirits and the Devil. While the pamphlet does not actually state that the imps are instruments or embodiments of the Devil, the fact that they actually go away when Bennett reaffirms her faith in God and the Holy Spirit strongly indicates that they are minions of the Devil.

¹²⁵W. W., "A true and just Record of the Information, Examination, and Confession of tal the Witches, taken at St. Osyth in the County of Essex" (London, 1582) in Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618* pp. 122-124.

¹²⁶W. W., p 125.

The 1589 pamphlet account of yet another set of trials at Chelmsford, entitled "The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches...", bears an even closer resemblance to the later concept of familiar spirits being given to the witch upon the completion of her covenant with the Devil. Joan Cunny confessed "that she learned this her knowledge in the same [witchcraft] of one Mother Humphrey of Maplestead, who told her that she must kneel down upon her knees and make a circle on the ground, and pray unto Satan the chief of the devils (the form of which prayer that she then taught her this examine hath now forgotten), and that then the spirits would come to her."¹²⁷ Cunny reported that she later put this teaching into practice. She went into a field, drew a circle upon the ground, and, kneeling, prayed to and called upon Satan. Two spirits in the shape of black toads then appeared to her and "there demanded of her what she would have, being ready to do for her what she would desire, so that she would promise to give them her soul for their travail, for otherwise they would do nothing for her."¹²⁸ In this narrative, the familiars are clearly allied with Satan and already asking for Cunny's soul, a feature which becomes central to the idea of a covenant with the Devil later in the period. This account differs from the later descriptions of pacts with the Devil, however, in that the familiars ask for her soul for themselves and do not require any of her blood to seal the covenant.

In the examination and confession of Joan Prentice, reported in the same pamphlet, the accused claimed the Devil himself appeared to her in animal form, asking her for her soul. She alleged that Satan, in the shape of a ferret, first demanded her soul and then when she refused him, saying "that he demanded of her what was not hers to give," he accepted her refusal calmly and demanded some of her blood instead. The

¹²⁷"The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches, arraigned and by justice condemned at Chelmes-forde, in the Countye of Essex the 5. day of Julye, last past 1589" (1589) in Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, p.183.

¹²⁸"The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches...", p. 184.

ferret returned to her several times for blood, and only after his second visit did he offer to do her bidding.¹²⁹ This confession is interesting because it is among the earliest in which the accused witch claimed that the Devil himself appeared to her and demanded her soul, while still sharing the notion that the familiar demanded blood and performed the witch's bidding. It is unusual, however, in the way in which Satan himself appears but never provides her with a lesser spirit and does not initially offer to trade his services for her soul. Prentice's account seems to be a transitional document in which various elements present in witchlore were expressed before they had been combined into a cohesive pattern. These narratives of Cunny and Prentice anticipate many elements of the relationship between Satan and familiars that become key in trials orchestrated later by divines as they attempt to integrate popular folklore with educated witchcraft beliefs.

A 1612 pamphlet also seems to reflect the same increasing synthesis of popular folklore about familiars and learned witchcraft beliefs. Though the account contains neither the witches' own confessions nor descriptions of the pacts the witches were thought to have made with the devil, the pamphleteer's own words suggest that he accepts the concept of a covenant sealed with familiars. In the case of one bewitchment, he suggests that the Devil himself is involved, acting as a sentinel and preventing those who would help the afflicted from entering her house. Additionally, he writes:

The imp of this dam (and both imps of the Devil) being glad that they were both out of his reach, showed presently that they had longer arms than he. For he felt within a short time after this coming home that he was not out of their reach, being by the devilish practices of these two hell-hounds suddenly and grievously tormented...¹³⁰

His repeated references to the devil in describing these familiars emphasizes the close relation between the imps and Satan. Thus, even though the pamphlet only briefly

¹²⁹"The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches...", pp. 186-188.

¹³⁰"The Witches at Northamptonshire who were all executed at Northampton the 22 of July last, 1612" (London, 1612) in Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, p. 347.

touches on the role of familiars in bewitchment and the relation between the imps and the Devil, it suggests that notions about the ties between Satan and familiar spirits have been so thoroughly accepted that they need not be explained in detail.

The notion of the witch entering a covenant with the Devil and subsequently receiving familiars to do her bidding is fully expressed in the 1613 pamphlet which recounts the cases of two families of witches in the Pendle woods in Lancashire. Anne Whittle, alias Chattox, claimed that the Devil appeared to her "in the likeness of a man" and "moved this examinate that she would become his subject and give her soul unto him."¹³¹ She consented and he drew blood from her side; Whittle was then approached by a familiar in the shape of a spotted dog who offered her "worldly wealth" and as much food and drink as she wished.¹³² Elizabeth Southern, alias Demdike, claimed to have been similarly approached by a devil who demanded her soul in return for "anything that she should request."¹³³ She, however, requested nothing, and after several years, she said the spirit came to her in the shape of a brown dog and bit her, forcibly drawing blood.¹³⁴ In the sample of sources used in this research, this pamphlet represents the first recorded instance of the "Faustian" covenant between the Devil and a witch, involving the trade of the witch's soul for a familiar, sealed with the letting of the witch's own blood.

This type of pact seems even more standardized in the 1619 pamphlet "The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillippa Flower..." The pamphleteer writes:

When the Devil perceived the inficuous disposition of this wretch
[Joan Flower], and that she and her daughters might easily be made

¹³¹Thomas Potts, esq., "The Wonderfull Discoverie of Witches in the Countie of Lancaster..." (London, 1613) in Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, p. 362.

¹³²Potts, pp. 362-363.

¹³³Potts, p. 358.

¹³⁴Potts, p. 359.

instruments to enlarge his kingdom...he came more nearer unto them, and in plain terms (to come quickly to the purpose) offered them his service; and that in such a manner as they might easily command what they pleased; for he would attend you in such pretty forms of dog, cat or rat, that they should neither be terrified nor anybody else suspicious in the matter.

Upon this they agree and (as it should seem) give away their souls for the service of such spirits as he had promised them; which filthy conditions were ratified with abominable kisses and an odious sacrifice of blood, not leaving out certain charms and conjuration with which the Devil deceived them, as though nothing could be done without ceremony and a solemnity of orderly ratification.¹³⁵

This passage describes the final synthesis between the popular English folk beliefs about familiars and the learned witchcraft beliefs involving a covenant of blood with the Devil.

The notion of this elaborate pact between Satan and the witch resulted from the fusion of local, popular beliefs about familiars and the more learned educated witchcraft beliefs, influenced by notions of witchcraft from the continent; the popular concept of the familiar, however, was not the simple animal associate of the witch which aided her in causing *maleficium*, as envisioned by Holmes. Thomas argues that most Englishmen were slow to accept the continental witchcraft beliefs, pointing out the second witchcraft statute passed in 1563 still focused on *maleficium*; the continental doctrine of witchcraft did not affect the law until 1604.¹³⁶ The image of the unreliable, "diabolical" familiar was present in the pamphlets, however, as early as 1566. Thus, the notion of the "demonic" familiar was present in England before educated theories about witchcraft permeated all levels of society.

One aspect of the "diabolical" characterization of familiars in the popular pamphlets was malice; the suggestion that they enjoy doing harm for its own sake. Elizabeth Bennett claimed, for example, that one of the familiars who came to tempt her attempted to push her into a hot oven; only a fire fork across the oven prevented him, and

¹³⁵"The Wonderful Discoverie of the Witchcrafts of Margaret and Phillippa Flower, daughters of Joan Flower neere Bever Castle..." (London 1619) in Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, p. 372

¹³⁶Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 441-442.

Bennett's arm was nevertheless severely burnt and scarred.¹³⁷ Bennett added that one of her imps, Suckin, plagued a neighbor, with whom she had a disagreement, unto death. She claimed "it was done by the spirit, but not by the sending of this exanimate."¹³⁸ Throughout the narrative, the two familiar spirits were characterized by an eagerness to cause harm, particularly serious injuries and death. They seemed almost spiteful, interested in harm for its own sake. Alice Mansfield reported in her confession that her four imps once asked permission to go aid another witch, saying "that they would burn barns and also kill cattle."¹³⁹ The Mansfield narrative showed the spirits actually asking leave to go cause injury in the same way a child would ask to go on an outing. In the 1579 pamphlet "A Detection of damnable driftes..," Elizabeth Francis claims that a spirit appeared to her directly after she engaged in a quarrel with a neighbor; she asked it to torment the neighbor, which the spirit promptly did. It asked in return, not for her soul, but merely for a piece of bread.¹⁴⁰ The fact that the familiar was willing to act for Francis with so little reward suggests that the imp derived pleasure from the acts of mischief themselves. Joan Prentice claimed that when she told her familiar, Bid, to nip a child and injure her only slightly, the ferret disobeyed her and caused the child to die in spite of her orders.¹⁴¹ This act could only be attributed to sheer malevolence. These incidents are illustrative of a general tendency in the pamphlets to portray familiars as actively malicious rather than simply instruments of the witches' ill will.

Familiars were also portrayed in the pamphlets as unreliable; though they promise the witches power or wealth, they do not always deliver what they promise. Elizabeth Francis "desired to have one Andrew Byles to her husband, which was a man of some

¹³⁷W.W., p. 123.

¹³⁸W. W., p. 124.

¹³⁹W. W., p. 139.

¹⁴⁰"A Detection of damnable driftes, practized by three Witches arraigned at Chelmsforde in Essex..." (1579) in Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, p. 93.

¹⁴¹"The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches..." pp. 187.

wealth, and the cat did promise she should, but that he said she must first consent that this Andrew should abuse her, and so she did. And after, when this Andrew had thus abused her, he would not marry her..."¹⁴² He then promised her another husband, but one that was "...not so rich as the other," and though this man, Francis, did marry her, the marriage was not happy.¹⁴³ Another instance of a familiar failing the witch occurred when Mother Waterhouse commanded her spirit to torment a neighbor, one Wardol, but he could not. He claimed that "the said Wardol was so strong in faith that he had no power to hurt him."¹⁴⁴ Likewise, when Joan Cunny sent her familiars to hurt Master Kitchen and George Coe, "they could not, and the cause why they could not, as the said spirits told her, was because they had at their coming a strong faith in God, and he had invocated and called upon Him, that they could do them no harm."¹⁴⁵ Thus, though the familiars promised to fulfill the witches' every wish, often they were not able to deliver on their promises.

Even when the familiars did provide the items that they promised, the things did not always bring the witches contentment. For example, Elizabeth Francis's familiars did provide her with a husband in the end, but "after they were married they lived not so quietly as she desired, being stirred, as she said to much unquietness, and moved to swearing and cursing."¹⁴⁶ She was so discontent with her marriage that she later ordered her familiar to lame her husband and kill her child. In another episode she recounted, she asked her familiar for sheep "and this cat forthwith brought sheep into her pasture to the number of 18, black and white, which continued with her for a time, but in the end did all

¹⁴²"The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chelmsforde..." p. 75.

¹⁴³"The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chelmsforde..." p. 75.

¹⁴⁴"The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chelmsforde..." p. 81.

¹⁴⁵"The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches..." p. 184.

¹⁴⁶"The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chelmsforde..." p. 75.

wear away, she knew not how."¹⁴⁷ Though the familiar fulfilled his promise to her, she never benefited from the things he provided. Similarly, Anne Whittle, called Chattox, claimed that her familiars provided food and drink at her command, but "that although they did eat, they were never the fuller nor better for the same..."¹⁴⁸ There is a sense, therefore, that the gifts given by familiars are transitory or false in some way, and that they cannot bring happiness. y
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Moreover, in a few cases, treacherous familiars were reported to betray their witches when they were needed most; they abandoned the witches shortly before the witches were apprehended. Alice Mansfield claimed that "one of her imps, not above a sevendnight before her apprehension told her that she should be called in question, and bade her shift for herself, saying they would now depart from her and go unto St. Osyth unto Mother Grey..."¹⁴⁹ Alice Hunt told a similar story, stating that her familiars "told her that the said Ursula Kemp would bewray her this examine, and willed her therefore to shift for herself."¹⁵⁰ In another case, Arthur Bill's mother complained to her familiar that she was afraid that "the power of the law should be stronger than the power of her art" and that she would hang. The spirit "answered, giving this sorry comfort, that she should not be hanged but to prevent that, she should cut her own throat."¹⁵¹ Thus, familiars were frequently portrayed to be unhelpful and unsympathetic towards the witches, turning their backs when the women were truly in need. No narratives relate tales of the familiars giving helpful advice or aiding the witch to elude capture. Familiars, therefore, were depicted in the pamphlets as unreliable and ultimately treacherous.

¹⁴⁷"The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chelmsforde..." p. 74.

¹⁴⁸Potts, p. 363.

¹⁴⁹W. W., p. 139.

¹⁵⁰W. W., p. 127.

¹⁵¹"The Witches at Northampton who were all executed at Northampton the 22 of July last 1612" (London, 1612) in Rosen, *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, pp 350-351.

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The general untrustworthiness of familiars seems symptomatic of the larger issue of the witches' imperfect control of their familiars. Though theoretically the familiar spirits were at the witch's command, the pamphlets portray the witches power over familiars in practice as somewhat limited. In one case, Joan Waterhouse sent her mother's familiar to torment another girl. The court allowed that if the witches could call off the demon, they would drop the case. Agnes Waterhouse confessed that they could not, explaining "for in faith if I had let him go as my daughter did I could make him come by and by; but now I have no more power over him."¹⁵² She admitted that she could not fully control the familiar under certain circumstances. Her ability to control the spirit, then, was circumscribed and limited. When Joan Prentice commanded her familiar to "Go unto Master Glascock's house, and nip one of his children a little, named Sara, but hurt it not," the familiar returned the next day and reported that "he had done as she willed him, namely, that he had nipped Sara Glascock and that she should die thereof."¹⁵³ She is reportedly furious, and the familiar vanished in the face of her anger, never to return. This episode suggests that it was believed that familiar spirits could embellish, reinterpret, or disregard their orders as they pleased. was (?)
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The familiars, moreover, occasionally were shown to have initiative, urging or even forcing a witch into certain behavior. Familiars would frequently, as in the cases of Elizabeth Bennet¹⁵⁴, Joan Prentice¹⁵⁵, Elizabeth Southern¹⁵⁶ and Anne Whittle¹⁵⁷, actively press the women to take up witchcraft; there are even instances where the familiar spirits forcibly draw blood from the prospective witch without her consent. Southern described an episode in which her familiar tried to persuade her to help

¹⁵²"The examination and confession of certaine Wytches at Chelmsforde..." p. 81.

¹⁵³"The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches...", p. 187.

¹⁵⁴W. W., pp. 122-125.

¹⁵⁵"The Apprehension and confession of three notorious Witches...", pp. 186-188.

¹⁵⁶Potts, pp. 358-361.

¹⁵⁷Potts, pp. 362-363.

Whittle and her daughter shape a "picture" to bewitch someone; she claimed "this examine denying to go back to help them to make the pictures aforesaid, the said spirit, seeming to be angry, therefore shove[d] or pushed this examine into the ditch..."¹⁵⁸ Sometimes it is the familiars themselves who suggest that they should go revenge the witch's slights. Alice Mansfield's familiars, for example, displayed initiative in asking permission to go burn buildings and kill cattle.¹⁵⁹

The representations of familiars as deceptive, treacherous, and uncontrollable suggest that the perceived power relationship between witches and their familiars must be reexamined. Some contemporaries questioned the nature of the association between witch and imp. In *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraft*, George Gifford explores the relationship in some detail. He asks "as first, tell me, whether do you thinke that the witch or the divell is the servant; which of them commaundeth, and which obeyeth?"¹⁶⁰ He begins the dialogue with the assertion: "It is thought he becommeth her servant, and where she is displeased and would be revenged, she hireth him for to do it. The witches themselves have confessed thus much: and for my part, I thinke no man can disprovee it."¹⁶¹ He argues, however, that the Devil is subtle and deceptive, and well able to play on the minds of the weak and foolish. After much theological circumlocution, one side concludes "the witch is the vassall of the divell, and not be her servant; he is lord and commaundeth, and she is his drudge and obeyeth."¹⁶² Whichever stance Gifford himself held, his *Dialogue* makes it clear that both notions were present in early modern English society. It is possible, and even likely, that pamphleteers were influenced by both views in some respects, and that the pamphlets represent a composite

¹⁵⁸Potts, p. 360.

¹⁵⁹W. W., p. 139.

¹⁶⁰George Gifford, *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraft* (1593) in Peter Haining, ed., *The Witchcraft Papers* (New Jersey, 1974) p. 88.

¹⁶¹Gifford, p. 88.

¹⁶²Gifford, p. 88.

of both outlooks. It is too simplistic, therefore, to assume that power was perceived to be unidirectional in the relationship between witch and familiar.

The perceived nature and role of the familiar in early modern English witchcraft, therefore, must be reevaluated. Clearly, the notion of familiars as "diabolical" imps closely associated with the Devil is present in England well before educated witchcraft beliefs permeated all levels of society. Moreover, the conception, accepted by most scholars, of the familiar as a passive instrument of the witches does not mesh with the representations of diabolical, unreliable, and manipulative familiar spirits in the popular pamphlets.

While the pamphlets focus on the role of familiars as agents of the Devil or some other evil, however, they also show another function of familiar spirits. The familiars often serve as ties between witches within the community. Sharpe points out that witches occasionally share or borrowed familiars.¹⁶³ The pamphlets contain many instances, discussed at length in an earlier chapter, of familiars being passed back and forth between witches in the same community. This give and take suggests that familiars, beyond being simply implementors of harm, were also the basis of interactions among witches in the community.

The pamphlets also suggest that familiars had an important role in purveying information and gossip about the activities of other witches in the community. Ursula Kemp, when asked how she knew the names of Elizabeth Bennett's spirits, replied "that Tiffin her spirit did tell this examinee that she [Bennett] had two spirits, the one of them like a black dog and the other red like a lion, and that their names were Suckin and Lierd, and saith that Suckin did plague Byatt's wife unto death, and the plagued three of his beasts, whereof two of them died and the third lay sick..."¹⁶⁴ She similarly asked Tiffin

¹⁶³Sharpe, "The devil in East Anglia", pp. 248-249.

¹⁶⁴W.W., "A true and just Recorde" p. 118.

about other incidents and the doings of other witches, which he was usually able to answer.¹⁶⁵ Thus, Kemp credited her familiar with telling her about the activities of other witches in the area. Other witches claimed that their familiars informed them about the actions of witches in the community as well. Alice Manfield stated that her familiars told her about the bewitchments caused by another witch, Margaret Grevell.¹⁶⁶ Alice Hunt claimed that her imps, Jack and Robin, warned her "that the said Ursual Kemp would bewray her this examine..."¹⁶⁷ Familiars were, therefore, not only seen as agents for spreading the witches' ill will, but also for spreading information among the witches of the community. The spreading of gossip might have been regarded as another aspect of the familiars' malice, as the rumors they spread often found their way to the ears of the magistrates and brought suspicion to bear upon many of the accused. These instances suggest, in any case, that it was familiars who bound the witches of a community together, whether by being passed from one to the other or by spreading gossip among them.

Familiars, therefore, were perceived in almost contradictory ways. On one hand, imps were diabolic beings who brought dissent and misfortune to the community, while on the other, they provided ties which drew the witches in the community together. The duality of the roles of the familiar and the complexity of their characterization emphasize the importance of the familiars and their functions within witchcraft beliefs. Imps simultaneously divided witches and drew them together, empowered them and then betrayed them, leaving them vulnerable. Moreover, the portrayal of familiars and their roles in the pamphlets seem to reinforce the idea that humans, and particularly women,

¹⁶⁵W.W., "A true and just Recorde" pp. 118-119, 133.

¹⁶⁶W.W., "A true and just Recorde" pp. 138-139.

¹⁶⁷W.W., "A true and just Recorde" p. 127.

are imperfect creatures and, while not inherently evil, are easily tempted by outside forces into depravity. Familiars, therefore, seem to have a central and highly functional role in witchcraft beliefs which changed over time, growing increasingly important.

V. Conclusion

Historians often seem to argue that witchcraft in early modern England had a *functional* quality, that it was used by various individuals or groups to control others. Such arguments seem to imply that the accusers consciously used witchcraft accusations as an instrument of subjugation. Jonathan Barry, however, claims that in the attempt to make witchcraft trials functional and rational, scholars may 'over-explain' the instances. He also suggests that such explanations may cause both the researcher and the reader to draw the line between conscious manipulation and honest belief too tightly. Barry concludes that witchcraft was not merely a tool manipulated by cynics with an agenda, but that "it often expressed a genuine belief by the accusers that their opponents stood for a dangerous principle threatening the community--which might indeed make them "witch-like" in their threat to social harmony."¹⁶⁸

Witchcraft accusations were not simply functional responses to a single type of individual or behavior, but rather reactions to a variety of conditions and situations in the community and in the relationships between *particular* individuals. In searching for a logical, non-magical explanation for the witchcraft accusations, some scholars have oversimplified the contexts of the accusations by attributing them to a single motivation. The one aspect of the witchcraft trials that is shown the most clearly in all of the popular pamphlets, however, is the complexity of the emotions and the fears behind the accusations and the conflicting beliefs reflected in the actions and words of everyone involved in the incidents, including the pamphlet writers. The pamphlets do not represent all witches in the same mold. They depict an array of accused witches, from many walks

¹⁶⁸Jonathan Barry, "Introduction: Keith Thomas and the problem of witchcraft", in *Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe: Studies in Culture and Belief*, Jonathan Barry, Marianne Hester, and Gareth Roberts, eds. (Cambridge, 1996) pp. 13-14.

of life and stations within the community, who came to be accused within the context of a range of situations. There does not seem to be the perception of one common, overwhelming fear. Each writer was apparently concerned with a different aspect of witchcraft or a different threat. Even within one pamphlet, the writer may present conflicting representations of witches. Given the range of representations of witches found within the pamphlets, it is not logical that witchcraft accusation were responses to only one type of situation or condition. Instead, each case must have arisen from a combination of factors within the accused witch's own particular community.

The popular contemporary witchcraft pamphlets are, perhaps, inaccurate sources in one sense. The incidents they report have not only been filtered through the medium of an educated writer, but also shaped by the witnesses who testify about them and the courtroom setting in which they are brought forth. The pamphlets, therefore, promulgate *interpretations* of the events rather than simple chronicles. The ways in which the witches and their alleged activities are represented, however, are in themselves informative. They hint at the types of tensions and fears that were present in society. Even the seeming contradictions within the representations suggest different attitudes circulating within communities.

In 1582, W.W., author of the pamphlet chronicling a series of witchcraft trials at St. Osyth in Essex, wrote that witches were "guilty of apparent apostasy, which is more heinous, considering the circumstances of their ordinary actions, than any trespass against the second table..." and that "no punishment can be thought upon, be it in never so high a degree of torment, which may be deemed sufficient for such a devilish and damnable practice."¹⁶⁹ Yet, in spite of this strong language explaining the evils of witches, he frequently portrays them as pathetic, weak women tempted and then betrayed

¹⁶⁹W.W., "A true and just Recorde, of the Information, Examinatin and Confession of all the Witches, taken at S. Oses in the countie of Essex..." (London, 1582) in Barbara Rosen, ed. *Witchcraft in England, 1558-1618*, (Amhearst, 1969) p.105.

by their own familiars and by their associates.¹⁷⁰ This inconsistency and indecisiveness in the representations of witches is common to nearly all of the popular witchcraft pamphlets. Pamphlet writers frequently seem to moderate both the power and the evil of witches by attributing some of the responsibility to other sources, such as a familiar,¹⁷¹ the Devil,¹⁷² or even a male leader, as in the Windsor case.¹⁷³ Thus, the pamphlets usually display a complex, ambivalent, and often inconsistent view of witches.

One side, perhaps, was a genuine belief in the danger posed by witches, while on the other was a reluctance to credit women with the power inherent in witchcraft if regarded seriously. Additionally, if witches were, in fact, associated with the mother-figure, there may even have been some hesitancy to paint them as completely black; instead, much of the blame was shifted onto familiars or the Devil. The resulting portrayals of witches were inconsistent, some truly threatening, some merely pathetic, and most somewhere in between as pamphleteers attempted to navigate between the two extremes. The pamphlets, therefore, may suggest where the gender line was drawn, how much power the writers and the witnesses were willing to concede that the accused witches might have. Changes in the pamphlet representations of witches over time would indicate probably changes in gender attitudes over time.

¹⁷⁰See W.W., pp. 111, 120, 122-125, 127, 139.

¹⁷¹See Rosen, pp. 81, 122-125, 127, 139, 186-188, 350-351, 358-361, 362-363.

¹⁷²See Rosen, pp. 347, 358-363, 372.

¹⁷³"A Rehearsall...of hainous and horrible acts committed by...Fowre notorious Witches, apprehended at Winsore..." (London, 1579) in Rosen, pp. 83-91.

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These popular witchcraft pamphlets contain a wealth of detail about the circumstances of the cases and the evidence at the trials. They were likely written for the literary London market, which thrived on sensational news. Nevertheless, the pamphlets, when compared to the depositions of the specific cases, have actually proved to be quite accurate. They were probably written soon after the event from first-hand accounts of the trials or court records. The pamphlet accounts cover only a small sampling of the witchcraft trials that occurred, but they appear to be representative of contemporary ideas and representations of witches.

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Literary aspects
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